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Monday, 23 September 2013, 9 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ashe ..... (Antigua and Barbuda)

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

High-level Meeting on the Realization of the Millennium Development Goals and Other Internationally Agreed Development Goals for Persons with Disabilities

Agenda item 27

Social development

(b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Draft resolution (A/68/L.1)

The President: I declare open the High-level Meeting on the Realization of the Millennium Development Goals and Other Internationally Agreed Development Goals for Persons with Disabilities. This meeting is held in accordance with resolutions 66/124 of 19 December 2011 and 67/140 of 20 December 2012.

Statement by the President

The President: I warmly welcome all participants to this High-level Meeting, whose overarching theme is "The way forward: a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond." This meeting is taking place in order to strengthen efforts and to ensure access for and inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of development, and looks forward to the contribution its outcome document could make towards mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities within the development agenda beyond 2015.

At the outset, I would like to thank the co-facilitators of the outcome document, the Permanent Representative of the Philippines, Mr. Libran Cabactulan, and the Permanent Representative of Spain, Mr. Fernando Arias, for their tireless efforts working with all stakeholders to achieve the successful outcome we have before us today (A/68/L.1), which we are about to adopt. I would furthermore like to acknowledge the Member States for their constructive role during the negotiation process, and the Secretariat for providing support. Today we are also joined by many members of civil society organizations, particularly organizations of persons with disabilities. I thank them for their commitment to this agenda.

Disability-inclusive development is not a new idea. Our guiding document, the Charter of the United Nations, is based on economic and social progress, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all; while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins with the timeless words "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". During the past decades, the United Nations has been promoting full participation and equality for persons with disabilities. That commitment leaves no room for their exclusion from society and development.

In an attempt to classify their physical and mental differences, some have labelled the disabled "differently abled", but let us not forget that people with disabilities — physical, sensory, mental and intellectual — are the world's largest minority, numbering more than 1 billion. They are a diverse and varied group, each with unique gifts and abilities

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and each with unique challenges. Their lives are often a constant struggle to achieve in every sphere of life, but more so in the performance of daily activities that many of us take for granted. In so doing, they teach us not only lessons about love and respect but also about perseverance against the odds. That is why it is important for us to reflect purposefully on why we are all gathered here today.

Let us take note of the fact that the vast majority of persons with disabilities live in developing countries and experience disproportionately high rates of poverty. In all parts of the world they are more likely to experience discrimination and prejudice. Persons with disabilities are subjected to a range of barriers, and many are regularly denied the right to education, social security, employment, health and other services that are available to the rest of the general public. Far too many are hidden from view by others and robbed of any contact, dignity or joy because of poverty, lack of support services and an unwarranted sense of shame — all terrible ignorance.

In the year 2000, the General Assembly adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Efforts towards achieving the Goals have led to a number of successes in eradicating hunger and poverty, alleviating the disease burden, improving access to water and increasing primary education enrolment. However, the unfortunate reality is that persons with disabilities have not benefitted equally. In fact, all eight MDGs, with attendant targets and indicators, there is no reference to persons with disabilities.

Efforts to redress that imbalance are already on the way. In the years since the adoption of the MDGs, the General Assembly has promoted disability-inclusive development as a priority issue. It has also called for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in internationally agreed development goals. The international community has now come to the realization that, in order to achieve other goals, including the MDGs, without incorporating the rights, well-being and perspectives of persons with disabilities, will be impossible, given the size of such a marginalized group. The onus is on us all to ensure that any future sustainable development goals include the disabled.

In 2006, we saw significant progress when the General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. To date, 134 countries have ratified or acceded to the Convention, which was from its inception envisaged both as a human rights and a development instrument. The Convention is a strong symbol of the international community's commitment to include the disability perspective in all aspects of society and development. While symbols are no doubt important, that commitment now needs to be fully integrated into all current and future development frameworks and interventions.

This High-level Meeting comes at a critical crossroads in the history of the United Nations, particularly for this session of the General Assembly. The theme of today's meeting is inextricably linked to the over-arching theme I have selected for the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly, namely, "The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage". I hope that participants' further deliberations today will identify constructive ways to integrate the issue of disability into the proposed agenda that is emerging. We all agree that the core goals must be poverty eradication and sustainable development, which can only happen with greater opportunity for all, equality and inclusive social development. A development path that excludes the participation of persons with disabilities in economic, social and political life can neither be inclusive nor sustainable. In particular, our efforts at the international level should be focused on providing critical leadership to mobilize action and support for specific policy commitments in national and regional environments and harnessing best practices and experiences and resources from effective multi-stakeholder partnerships.

One critical and urgent improvement would be to ensure that all buildings, facilities and public spaces are specifically designed to accommodate access and use by those who are disabled and that more technologies are created to improve their quality of life and to fully integrate them into the mainstream of social and work activity and life.

The draft outcome document before us stresses the importance of giving due consideration to persons with disabilities in the post-2015 development agenda. It envisions a fully inclusive society and can guide our efforts towards 2015 and future decades to come. I urge Member States to spare no effort in implementing the outcome document.

A post-2015 development agenda that benefits all among us is the vision that we must pledge to achieve. Our journey towards a post-2015 development agenda

must envision a world that is just and equitable for all persons, equally and without discrimination.

I now give the floor to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: This is the most important period of the year at the United Nations. Leaders from around the globe are gathering to focus on peace and security, development and human rights. I believe there is no better way to begin this momentous week than with this historic High-level Meeting.

I want to extend my warmest welcome to all present — especially persons with disabilities and their representative organizations — and to thank them for bringing their strength and energy. Together, we are here to break barriers and open doors. We are here to forge the way forward and build a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond.

(*spoke in French*)

Disability is a part of the human condition; almost everyone will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life. More than 1 billion persons live with some form of disability — 80 per cent are of working age; 80 per cent live in developing countries. Yet far too many people with disabilities live in poverty. Too many suffer from social exclusion. Too many are denied access to education, employment, health care, and the social and legal support systems they require.

Women and girls with disabilities often experience double discrimination. That is why it is important to emphasize the gender dimension under the disability-inclusive development agenda.

All of us suffer when communities are divided, just as all of us benefit when communities are united. The International Labour Organization has found that the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labour market in some low- and middle-income countries costs those economies as much as 7 per cent of gross domestic product. We must remove barriers to ensuring equal opportunity so that all people can be free from poverty and discrimination.

(*spoke in English*)

Let us proclaim, in the loudest voice possible, that disability is not inability. As I have said in my report "A life of dignity for all" (A/68/202), persons with disabilities are integral to our forward march towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals and shaping the post-2015 agenda.

The landmark Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a powerful tool for inclusive development. I urge all countries to ratify it without delay. I know that the Assembly agrees with me and with Stevie Wonder that we need it signed, sealed and delivered. And we need more. We must further strengthen the international normative framework on disability and development. We must build capacity and improve data and statistics on persons with disabilities. We must act now to remove barriers to access to physical environments, transportation and information and communications. And we must not only lift the physical barriers, but also the barriers formed by attitudes that fuel stigma and discrimination.

All participants in this Meeting are here to do more than to change laws or policies or regulations. Ultimately, they are here to make sure that every member of the human family has a chance to live their life fully. I think of the director of a programme for special needs children in Haiti who said, "You should see the children's faces when they put on their uniforms — money could not buy that feeling of happiness". I think of the young football players I met in Sierra Leone a few years ago. Their limbs had been amputated during the civil war, and yet, there they were, playing soccer. To my eyes, they were even better than the World Cup soccer players. I think of the Syrian mother in a refuge camp who finally received a wheelchair for her daughter with disabilities. She said, "Now we can take her to see the doctor; now we can take her out. She has a right to see the sun."

Everyone has the right to happiness, to score their own goals, to see the sun and to expand their horizons. That is why the General Assembly is here. That is its message and mission. I am proud to be at the side of everyone here. Together, let us turn a new page in the history of the United Nations by giving full meaning to the outcome document of this Meeting (A/68/L.1). Let us work together so that everyone, everywhere has the chance to live their dreams and use the gifts that they have been given. Let us advance disability-inclusive development, inspire change on the ground and ensure a life of dignity for all.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Pursuant to paragraph 3 (b) of resolution 66/124, I now give the floor to Ms. Maria Soledad Cisternas Reyes, Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Ms. Cisternas Reyes (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, I congratulate the General Assembly on having organized this High-level Meeting stressing the necessity of the indelible link between human rights and social development.

Promoting, protecting and ensuring the full and equal enjoyment of the rights of all persons with disabilities in equal conditions, as well as respect for their inherent dignity, is the purpose of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is the lighthouse guiding our action in the twenty-first century. It sets out the human rights framework for persons with disabilities, in which we consider not only the disadvantages faced by persons with disabilities, but also their interaction with various barriers and how the latter may impose limitations to their participation. I note that with respect to dealing with barriers, States parties, all of society and persons with disabilities themselves have the primary responsibility to eliminate such barriers and to adopt affirmative measures aimed at ensuring equal opportunity to that section of the population.

I would also note that restrictions to the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in society can be seen in the manner in which they exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms. As the Secretary-General mentioned earlier, some 80 per cent of persons living with disabilities live in developing countries. Twenty per cent of the world's poorest are persons with disabilities, constituting the most disadvantage and poorest among the poor. For these reasons, the link between the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms and economic, cultural and social rights — education, health, work and social security, among others — may seem very obvious.

However, let us recall that persons with disabilities still struggle for their civil and political rights, and this cannot be forgotten in the context of social development. It is crucial to bear in mind the need for equal recognition as persons under the law and the full exercise of legal capacities for all persons living with disabilities, with the support and safeguards needed to ensure their ability to fully exercise their freedoms in their civic and personal lives.

I wish to point out that there are further substantive rights in the area of civil and political rights, including the rights to public political participation, to elect and to be elected, to form political parties and other representative groups, to live independently and included in their communities, to form a family, to live free from violence and cruel, inhumane or degrading treating, and to count on guaranteed and robust access to justice. This means that persons living with disabilities today must be given bridges to facilitate their exercise of their rights — bridges such as universal accessibility and the growing awareness that is permeating throughout societies and across generations of the change that is needed.

Likewise, I am sure — and I am speaking on behalf of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities — that the universal, indivisible and interdependent keystone that is human rights provides a strong backbone for social development, which must now become inclusive, accessible and sustainable. Such social development must be inclusive of persons with disabilities, whose rights are entirely inalienable, must be respected and cannot be ignored or neglected.

Today therefore a symbiosis is emerging between human rights and social development that will build on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, on the one hand, and on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the post-2015 agenda, on the other. It is on that illuminating basis that we must continue to work.

In drawing to a conclusion, I wish to say that the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities hopes that the outcome document of this High-level Meeting (resolution 68/3) will reflect the true meaning of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is a model for human rights in the twenty-first century, with a firm basis on equality and non-discrimination, and take into consideration the diverse range of persons with disabilities, including those living in the most vulnerable situations, such as women, girls, boys, the elderly, indigenous persons and those living in rural areas or under humanitarian situations because of natural disasters or armed conflict. We cannot forget those people.

Likewise, it is extremely important that States parties comply with their legal commitments under

this international agreement with due accountability, that data and statistics be collected regarding age, gender, diversity, disability and regarding particular factors, such as employment or violence. We are sure that our efforts to defend human rights will help us as we seek to implement and achieve the MDGs and the post-2015 agenda. In that regard, it could be added that international multilateral cooperation is absolutely crucial, in particular in the light of the numbers I cited earlier and of the fact that the majority of persons with disabilities live in developing countries.

In conclusion, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will spare no effort and will devote all of its expertise to assist this historic process of linking human rights and social development, which, I repeat, must be inclusive, accessible and sustainable. We do so because without us, it is silence that will resound today in this plenary Hall. We do so to ensure that this Meeting will succeed in uniting all aspects of the MDGs, the post-2015 agenda and social development with persons with disabilities.

The President: Pursuant to paragraph 3 (b) of resolution 66/124, I now give the floor to Mr. Yannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum, which enjoys consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

Mr. Vardakastanis (European Disability Forum): Today is a historic day. The international community has gathered here at the Headquarters of the United Nations to discuss the rights of persons with disabilities worldwide. The expectations of this High-level Meeting on disabilities and development are high. Expectations are high that the decision-makers will tackle a chronic structural problem that has not been a priority in national and global political agendas — the mainstreaming of disability rights.

However, with the presence of many high-level representatives today, this has seemed to change. Today, 15 per cent of the world's population, 1 billion persons with disabilities, are looking to us, and in particular to the decision-makers who take decisions at the national and international levels affecting any aspect of our lives. Those decisions affect all of us. Today is a day of determination. Today should be the day when the international community decides to move forward in a way that will create a tremendous momentum.

The International Disability Alliance, a unique world network of networks, which, through our members, extends to all States Members of the United Nations, has joined this High-level Meeting to give a voice to persons with disabilities worldwide who have been excluded. But today we want to speak loudly and clearly to all in the Hall.

It is widely accepted that people with disabilities face exclusion and discrimination and experience extremely high poverty rates. It has already been mentioned that 80 per cent of persons with disabilities live in developing countries and in unbearable situations. The Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities just referred to the fact that 20 per cent of the poorest of the world's population — the poorest of the poor — are persons with disabilities. They lack access to health care, education and employment. In many instances, persons with disabilities are the first victims of violence and abuse.

The rights of persons with disabilities remain minimally acknowledged, despite the fact that they have been enshrined in international law. After the adoption and ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we expected more. We do not wish to underestimate the progress achieved; nonetheless, we demand that the Convention become the driving force for all developments worldwide, and that we work harder to implement the rights that it enshrines. Persons with disabilities should be able to fully enjoy their rights on an equal basis with all other citizens of the world. I speak of women, men, children, the elderly and indigenous peoples with disabilities, who expect to be able to participate fully and meaningfully in society.

The Millennium Development Goals contain no reference to persons with disabilities; persons with disabilities have been invisible, indeed, forgotten. That cannot be tolerated in the post-2015 development agenda. Development at all levels, and in every corner of the world, must include the rights of persons with disabilities. That development must be Convention-driven. In practice, that means that the rights of persons with disabilities should be mainstreamed into every aspect of development. Persons with disabilities must be able to enjoy and have their share of inclusive growth. Inclusion, non-discrimination and equity must be the driving principles on which the new global development agenda is established. The rights of persons with disabilities should be mainstreamed in development partnerships, and global partnerships specific to persons with disabilities should be formed. The inclusion of persons with disabilities in the

development agenda has been recognized as critical in the reports of both the Secretary-General and the High-level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Those here in the Hall, the decision-makers, together with organizations of persons with disabilities, have the responsibility, and indeed the obligation, to make that happen. The ways in which persons with disabilities see their needs reflected in the new agenda must be explored through appropriate implementation, mechanisms and accurate monitoring of data. Persons with disabilities must cease to be people who have lower levels of education and higher levels of unemployment; they must cease to be the victims of a system that, as I said, lacks accessible transportation, health care, information services and so forth. The post-2015 development agenda must aim to take persons with disabilities out of the lowest income levels; poverty eradication for persons with disabilities must be made a major priority in Convention negotiations and afterward.

The motto "Nothing about us without us" has been a propelling force for progress and determination for persons with disabilities and their families. Today, those here in the General Assembly are listening to us; tomorrow they will be listening to national, regional and global disability movements. Development should be inclusive of the rights of persons with disabilities. That is a prerequisite and a precondition. Today we ask not only that the Assembly express and declare its commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities, but that it also put in place the mechanisms necessary for those commitments to be met and for practical results to be delivered in partnership with organizations for persons with disabilities, as the Convention states in paragraph 3 of article 4 and paragraph 3 of article 33 (resolution 61/106, annex).

To conclude: the poet has said that

> "Some there are who live in darkness/while the others live in light./We see those who live in daylight,/those in darkness, out of sight".

Working all together, in partnership, to make our societies inclusive of all, with development for all that includes disability rights, we can bring those out of sight — persons with disabilities around the world — into the light.

The President: Pursuant to paragraph 3 (b) of resolution 66/124, I now give the floor to Mr. Stevie Wonder, Grammy-award-winning songwriter and musician and United Nations Messenger of Peace.

Mr. Wonder: It is a great honour to participate in this High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on disability and development. I am very happy to be here today at this historic event. In 2009, I was appointed a United Nations Messenger of Peace, with a focus on persons with disabilities. In that role I have had the opportunity to advocate internationally for the most fundamental goals of the United Nations, namely, peace, development and human rights for all. Today at this High-level Meeting we have the opportunity to focus on those goals for persons with disabilities in communities around the world.

I have always been a man of dreams and hopes. I know that by working together we can create a world where persons with disabilities face no limits and can freely live, work, enjoy life and contribute their talents to society. We have already accomplished so much in that regard.

Just two months ago, I traveled to Morocco to participate in a diplomatic conference to conclude a treaty to facilitate access to published works by visually impaired persons and persons with print disabilities. For society in development to include persons with disabilities we need to have equal access to education, knowledge and information; yet, out of millions of publications each year, fewer than five per cent are made available in accessible formats for visually impaired persons. In developing countries, an even smaller percentage of publications are available in accessible formats. The Marrakesh Treaty, as it is called, will greatly expand the availability of artistic and literary works in accessible forms such as Braille, large print text and audio books. That can make a real difference in the lives of the world's more than 300 million visually impaired persons.

One year ago, in October 2012, during the commemoration of the sixty-seventh anniversary of the United Nations, I gave a concert in the General Assembly Hall. On that occasion we celebrated the many achievements of the United Nations, but we also recognized that more needed to be done. We need to make sure that real participation and the voices of persons with disabilities are included in everything we do for peace and development around the world. As we look to the future and the advancement of disabilities and inclusive development, let us all in our own way

be messengers of peace. Many of us here are already working to create that world that will be inclusive of all.

I want to share a personal story with the Assembly that is kind of how I ended up here today. I was blessed to have a mother who allowed me to discover the world. From discovering the world around me, I took chances. Some of those chances she was against, but she believed that I would not be irresponsible. She always told me that if I did something outside what she said, I would get the belt. I am sure that everyone here knows what the belt is. But, obviously, on one occasion I took a chance that maybe turned out well in the end. I had a little thing that I did with my friends, where I would sing in an alley. I would sing different songs to a person who was a very spiritual man. Every time he would see me and my friends in the alley, we would be saying bad words to each other and talking crazy. And every time he would come and say, "Stevie, your voice is much better than to be using it for bad things. You should sing wonderful gospel songs." And I would sing, "You're so right, Mr. Hines, life is so good to me, and I know I should be singing to the Lord, yes I should!"

After that was all done, he would give me some money and I would go to the store with my friends and we would get candy. One particular time, I was hearing some music from a few blocks away and I said to my friend, "If you walk me across the street ..." — because if I walked across the street by myself I would get the belt, and he did not want to see me get the belt either and I did not want to feel it. Therefore he walked me across the street and we walked a few blocks and there were two people playing the guitar. I so happened to have my little bongo drums. As a result, I was able to meet the cousin of one of the members of the group Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, who obviously was with Motown Records. From that, Ronnie White made it possible for me to have an audition at Motown, where Berry Gordy discovered me.

The truth of the matter is that, through my being able to have that opportunity of being discovered at Motown, and through people's appreciation for the music I have done and was doing, it became possible for the dreams I had and the prayers of my mother to come true. I was also able to have various things that were not accessible and available to me to become available economically. Through travelling in the world, I was able to see and meet various people of various countries and discover the various technologies.

I wish for the day when there will be technology available for the blind, for things to be accessible and available for us to be able to do things by using various technologies of synthetic speech and voice. We have been very fortunate that things have moved to that place, but I believe that we must make that technology more available and accessible to every single blind person or person with disability all over the world. For me, there should be no one anywhere who has to live without being able to have access to all the world.

I would therefore encourage everyone from all the various nations to subsidize this technology, to make it possible. Not only will there be fewer taxes, but more importantly, every single person with a disability will be more independent and feel freer.

I thank the President for allowing me to speak today. I am looking forward to the day when I can write a song about how great it is when not only one nation but all of the nations of the world open up and handle what they need to do to make the world accessible for those with any disability at all.

The President: The Assembly will now proceed to consider draft resolution A/68/L.1, entitled "Outcome document of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities: the way forward, a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond". May I take it that the Assembly wishes to adopt draft resolution A/68/L.1?

Draft resolution A/68/L.1 was adopted (resolution 68/3).

The President: I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Ambassador Libran N. Cabactulan of the Philippines and to Ambassador Fernando Arias of Spain, who so ably and patiently conducted the discussions and complex negotiations in the informal consultations on the outcome document. Of course, I also thank all Member States for their valuable contribution to the successful completion of the outcome document.

The meeting rose at 10 a.m.